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OES-Director

From: deb-ryun@cdiowa.org%inter2 [deb-ryun@cdiowa.org]
Sent: Monday, August 15, 2005 4:13 PM
To: Johanns, Mike
Subject: USDA listening sessions

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August Forum
omments, Ryun.do.

Secretary Johanns--attached and below please find the comments I presented at the Iowa State Fair listening session as you've requested. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like to have a dialogue regarding conservation issues and the 2007 Farm Bill. Thank you for requesting a copy of my comments.

The 2007 Farm Bill discussions are well underway in Iowa and across the nation. Producers have long been interested in the U.S. federal farm policy and programs, but now many others seem to have an interest. World Trade Organization agreements will have a big impact on the next farm bill. Environmental and other groups are looking hard at the dollars spent on farm support payments; they support the conservation title and are weighing in on the discussion. Members of what we affectionately call the hook and bullet crowd look at conservation dollars as a way to increase wildlife habitat and also have been very active in discussions. Economists and many others are involved in the discussions as well.

In the 2002 Farm Bill, the Conservation Security Program (CSP) was enacted. Because the current pressure from around the world is demanding change in the way the U.S. delivers farm programs, we believe green payments should be the centerpiece of the next farm bill; implemented supporting the intent of the CSP legislation.

CDI supported the concepts of CSP for many reasons. Farmers and the conservation community developed it; it allowed for the one-stop approach for conservation. All producers were to have been eligible and payments were expected to reward good stewardship practices, on an ongoing basis. CSP was to foster innovation and is WTO compatible and can compliment existing programs. CSP is supposed to be an uncapped, entitlement program. It is intended to be a full national program and we believe it should be implemented that way.

If rules were developed well and enough funds were allocated by Congress, CSP could develop into the only conservation program needed. Having one conservation program would simplify things for farmers and staff. NRCS could get back in the business of whole farm conservation planning and away from the habit of program implementation.

If it is decided that more than one conservation program is necessary, then we believe that the current programs could be reworked in into basically three categories or programs. One for a land set-aside or retirement program, one for cost share assistance and one for green payments. Combining the current programs into three more flexible, simplified programs would give farmers greater ability to implement conservation plans with less stress. USDA NRCS and other staff in the conservation partnership could then focus on what they do well; provide technical assistance. Rangeland, grassland, air, forestry, wildlife and energy conservation issues can and should be part of the whole package.

Locally led conservation is embedded in the language of almost all the conservation programs in the 2002 Farm Bill. That policy should continue and should be taken seriously. It is impossible to implement programs at the national level which are meaningful to all states and all situations. State technical committees should be allowed to work with the state conservationists to set state priorities and program parameters.

USDA should strive to make all programs user friendly and easy to understand to maximize participation. They should do away with sign up periods and have programs

available on an ongoing basis. The general operations budget should be funded to allow the field staff the time needed to interact with clients who may or may not want or need program financial assistance, or who can utilize other state or local cost share programs in concert with federal assistance.

NRCS should continue the long standing partnership with local soil and water conservation districts. Conservation financial assistance is an important component in achieving agricultural sustainability both economically and environmentally. Their combined efforts and funding sources are what make the conservation movement effective.

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